

An interview with Paul Nasser

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PAUL NASSER

An Interview Conducted by

Frances Hughes

July 15, 1981

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## NARRATOR DATA SHEET

07/15/81

DATE

Name of narrator: Paul NasserAddress: 2414 College St., Terre Haute, IN Phone: 232-6517Birthdate: 1908 Birthplace: Fort Wayne, IndianaLength of residence in Terre Haute: 71 yearsEducation: Three years at Wiley High SchoolOccupational history: Grocery and also liquor store.

Special interests, activities, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

Major subject(s) of interview: Terre Haute West end, social life  
and customs, prostitution

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## Interviewing sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
07/15/81	2:10 P.M.	Vigo County Public Library	Frances Hughes

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PAUL NASSER

Tape 1

July 15, 1981

Vigo County Public Library, Terre Haute, IN

INTERVIEWER: Frances Hughes

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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FH:

This is Frances Hughes, and I am interviewing Paul Nasser at 2 o'clock, Wednesday afternoon, July 15, 1981 at the Vigo County main library.

Mr. Nasser, were you born in Terre Haute?

NASSER:

I was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and I was just a year old when my parents came here in 1909, which makes my birth in 1908. My father was in the grocery business in several locations. The last location I remember real plain when I was a child was 120 Wabash Avenue. That's before automobiles, almost. They were just barely getting started. When you saw an automobile, it was a curiosity. It was mostly horse and wagon and buggies back then. Of course, we had streetcars and interurbans that made runs from Terre Haute -- that is, the interurbans did. They'd run to Clinton and to Paris, Illinois, Sullivan and also Indianapolis. And the old traction barn was there between 8th Street and 9th Street on Cherry, right? And then the old car barns were right across the street. And the old Terminal Arcade building, its archway is still standing there as of today. Now, I don't know whether they're going to keep that up there or not; but it was told to me, Mr. Anton Hulman Jr. wants it left for a memorial. And I see now that they're in the process of tearing down a lot of those buildings and even remodelling the old American theater. Isn't that the American? Yeah, the American theater.

FH:

That's now the Early Wheels museum.

NASSER:

Yeah, Early Wheels. That's right.

FH:

I don't quite understand where you say the car barns were. The ticket office . . . the terminal for the interurbans was in that building but across the street, you say?

NASSER:

Across on Cherry.

THIRD PARTY: The north side of Cherry.

FH: Where the arena is now?

NASSER: Yes. Yes, that's right. Where the arena is. Later on . . . that was the old car barns and later on /it was/ Freitag and Weinhardt /Company/, after the car barn was gone. Then you had traction car barns . . . or a place 'way out on East Main Street where the regular streetcars went into. And that was about 20th, 30th . . . . Wouldn't that be about 30th Street? Right along in there on the north side. There's a great big place there where all the city streetcars went in there out of the weather as well as being repaired. And after that . . . well, after my dad had the grocery there at 120 Main Street, he moved to 4th and Eagle where he had a grocery. That was during World War I. And everything was in the bulk, and my job was sacking up potatoes and sacking sugar and coffee and beans. You name it, I had . . . that was the flunkie job that I had. (laughs) And kerosene, we sold kerosene, I think, /for/ about 10 cents a gallon at that time.

But after World War I, my dad bought the northwest corner of 4th and Eagle. He was at first on the southeast corner, and he remodelled that building and put a grocery in there. And from there . . . my older brothers ran that store. Of course, I was just a child at the time. And I learned the grocery business under them. And so, my brother, Jimmie . . . after Prohibition was repealed, my brother Jimmie, took out a beer and wine permit -- grocery permit. And he turned around and kept that for quite a while. Then he had a little tavern in the back of the grocery store. And my mother made (what we all like so much) kibby in a little restaurant in the back. She sold them for about 10 cents apiece at that time.

So, one thing led to another and when Jimmie got called to service, he left and my dad ran the store -- and my sister, Esther, with him.

FH: Was this in World War I he was called to service?

NASSER: This was II.

FH: World War II.

NASSER: That was World War II then.

FH: When you sacked the groceries, they came by the barrel, didn't they?

NASSER: Well, everything came in the bulk. It was in burlap sacks, a lot of it was back then. And even sugar, we had to bag up sugar. And just before the evening rush, we had a hand grinder for coffee. That was my job. They put the coffee in the top of that coffee grinder. And my job was to crank that coffee grinder and get the aroma all in the store, so when people walked in the store that aroma would keep up their appetites. If they didn't have coffee on their minds, they bought coffee. And that was one of the tricks of . . .

FH: Do you remember the prices they charged for groceries then, when you used to sack them up like that?

NASSER: No, I don't quite remember that. Huh-uh, no, I don't. I don't remember the prices, but I have some old handbills I'll show you [from] back in 1935.

FH: One thing I've always wondered, why so many Syrian-born people go into the grocery business.

NASSER: Well, at least they could eat. (laughs) At least they could eat. We didn't have . . . we didn't take the best. If we had a specked apple or specked potatoes or something like that, we'd take the bad part off and salvage the good part. And, of course, most of the Syrian families back then weren't much of pork eaters. They were more like the Jewish people. We're strictly lamb and beef and veal, the majority.

But the younger generation is altogether different. We eat hamhocks, pigs knuckles and snouts, you-name-'em. (laughs) But that's the older folks.

FH: Now, your family came from Syria originally, your parents?

NASSER: Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah. My dad came here first, as I told you before, and he and his first wife who was my mother's sister. And, of course, as I told you, before she passed away, she asked my father to bring her sister over here to raise her five children that she'd left -- infants. And when my mother came over, they refused her to come in the country. They put her back on the boat, and she had to go all the way around through the Suez Canal . . . or no, through the Panama Canal down to Mexico.

FH: Why?

NASSER: On account of her eyes.

FH: Did she have bad eyesight?

NASSER: Well, she had . . . what'd they call that?

THIRD PARTY: (whispering) Trachoma.

FH: Glaucoma?

NASSER: Yeah.

THIRD PARTY: Trachoma.

FH: Trachoma?

NASSER: Yeah. So, she went to Mexico and she contacted . . . Of course, she couldn't speak English. She had a little note, I guess, pinned on here. And she got ahold of my father, and my father made arrangements to get her into this country. And that's when she came over here. She come over here to Fort Wayne. They got married in 1907.

FH: And how many children did they have?

NASSER: Four from the second wife -- two girls and two boys. I'm the oldest one of her children. And my brother, Jimmie, was the second; and my sister, Maude, was the third. And Esther was the baby of the family.

FH: And Esther has Esther's Hideaway now?

NASSER: Right. Um hm. Yes.

FH: Was N. George Nasser your brother?

NASSER: Oh, yes. He was the baby that . . . of my father's first wife. N. George is a lawyer. Now let's see. I've lost four other brothers, older ones. In fact just about . . . oh, hardly a month or so ago I buried one brother.

FH: Someone told me that you were a shoeshine boy on Wabash when you were little.

NASSER: Oh, we did everything. We sold newspapers, shined shoes, run up and down alleys, you name it, back in the saloon days. I used to get a big stick and go around every Monday and go through the trash that these guys would clean out of the saloons, you know. Pick up a penny, nickel, quarter, dime, you know. They'd accidentally drop it. And run a lot of errands for the girls that worked on the line. And they'd always give you a generous tip. Back then a quarter was good money, and once in a while you'd get a girl that had a good day, why she'd give you half a dollar. (laughs)

But . . .

FH: Would they let you go in the saloons, a kid?

NASSER: Oh, yeah. I used to take . . . my uncle had a store there on Main Street (this is before Prohibition now) and he'd put a dime in a dinner pail, one of those dinner pails. And I'd go over to the saloon and, of course, the bartender would see me. He'd come around the bar, and he'd pick up the can and take the money out, fill the can with beer. And it was all I could do to carry it across the street. At that time there were hardly any automobiles, see.

FH: That was called "rushing the can" then, wasn't it?

NASSER: Yeah, "rushing the can" or whatever. Yeah.

FH: A lot of people did this. Sent a little pail to the saloon to get their beer, didn't they?

NASSER: Yeah, um hm. See, my uncle would have his

NASSER: lunch brought to him in his store, and he'd always like his beer with his lunch. And, of course, they didn't have the restrictions they've got today. You go in a saloon back then, as they called them, why you'd say, "I want a shot of whiskey." The guy would put the bottle out on the bar and give you the shot glass. You could fill it up to your heart's content for a dime. But now, this day and age, there's so much graft going on, you're lucky to even look at a shot of whiskey for less than a dollar.

FH: Did you ever eat any of the free lunch in the saloons? Would they let you?

NASSER: Yeah, I'll tell you what I did one time. I was shining shoes. And they had sawdust on the floor, you know, and they had these barrelhouses. They had the barrelhouses where they had barrels stacked along . . . tiers up on top of each other. You know how barrels are? And they'd have spigots in some of them. And some of them wouldn't, of course. They didn't have them all tapped.

And I'd go around with my shoeshine . . . it was a homemade box made out of a Granger Twist box -- tobacco box -- and I had my shoe brushes and my rags and my paste and my liquid polish. And we'd go in these saloons and say "Have a shine? Shine? Shine? Five cents." A lot of them'd say, "Aw, get away from here. I don't want no shine." Practically spit in your face.

So anyway, I'd see these guys get a nickel schooner of beer, and I mean it'd be a big mug of beer for a nickel! And they'd go to the end of the bar; and there'd be roast beef, baked ham, pickled eggs, oh, just practically anything you'd want -- rye bread, white bread, buns, whatever. You'd make your own sandwich, put it on a plate, go on back to sit at a table or at the bar -- all for about a 5-cent drink.

FH: Would they let you eat some food while . . .

NASSER: I'm a little scavenger, so I thought "Well, I'm going to go and get me something to eat the next time." 'Cause I'd go in these swinging doors,



NASSER: you know. I'd go to that there . . . it was called The Barrelhouse, there next to Jerry Shandy's drugstore. And I thought, "Well, now I'm going to go in there and get me something to eat. Boy, those guys are really eating high on the hog." So I go in there and say, "Shine? Shine? Shine?" until I get to the end of the bar. They had a brass railing in there and those big goboons about that tall (laughing and indicating with his hand), and I'd go to the end of the bar, and I'd get up on . . . put one foot on (I thought the bartender wasn't watching me), and I put one foot on the rail and one hand on the bar. My shoeshine box was on the strap on my shoulder. I'd reach over and anything I'd grab . . . I didn't care what it was. I knew it was food. So I'd grab something, you know. And I'm going down . . . I'm going down hidin' like this behind the bar . . . not behind, in front of the bar thinking the bartender didn't see me. All at once I heard some water splashing and all, like he was cleaning some rags or something. I got pretty near right close to him, and he hit me right back smack on the head. I think that's the reason I lost my hair. I jumped about ten feet! (laughs) But anyhow, that's my experience.

FH: Ordinarily, did they care if you took a little food?

NASSER: Ooooh, you aren't supposed to! Those were just for guys that bought a nickel beer. A little tramp like me couldn't get any (laughs) sandwich.

FH: Now, this particular saloon was called The Barrelhouse, but weren't most of the saloons in those days called barrelhouses because they. . .

NASSER: There were several of them, yes. Yes. But this one in particular was in the west end of town.

See, Jerry Shandy had a drugstore there at 3rd and Wabash on the northwest corner. And right next to that was the saloon. And that was The Barrelhouse. And if I remember right, it had a picture of Charlie Chaplin out there holding a mug of beer. /aside to third party/ And if I'm not mistaken, your dad had a grocery store at 1st and Wabash, wasn't it?

FH: That's Mr. [Carl] Ellis's dad?

NASSER: Mike Ellis, yeah. He had a grocery store on the north . . . no, southwest corner. Right?

And then there was the Lahams; [they] had a grocery store. In there was the Azars; they had a grocery store in there. And there was Hempleman brothers; and there was Brooks's saloon and old jockey alley was right on North 1st Street.

FH: And what was jockey alley?

NASSER: Where they traded horses back then like they trade automobiles today. That's when they traded horses.

FH: Where was the open market?

NASSER: Right around the courthouse.

FH: Now, these places you were talking about were around 3rd and Wabash?

NASSER: Right. Third and Wabash from there on to the river.

FH: And what other saloons were down there? I believe there was a Red Onion Saloon?

NASSER: Well, let's see.

THIRD PARTY: (in an undertone) First and Eagle.

NASSER: First and Eagle?

THIRD PARTY: (whispering) Yeah.

NASSER: Red Onion was at 1st and Eagle? And . . . now you had a lot of saloons up north of Main Street. I wasn't too well acquainted south of town as I was in the north end.

FH: Well, that was . . . that was the red light district, where all these saloons were.

THIRD PARTY: Right.

NASSER: Yeah. Yes.

FH: Wasn't there a Johnnie Boyd's?

THIRD PARTY: Why sure.

NASSER: (simultaneously) Johnnie Boyd's, yes.

FH: And McGinty's?

NASSER: Yep. McGinty.

THIRD PARTY: (simultaneously) McGinty's.

NASSER: And Hominy Godsey.

FH: Why was he called "Hominy"?

THIRD PARTY: That was his name.

NASSER: (simultaneously) Name.

And there was Jack Hines'.

FH: He was precinct committeeman.

NASSER: Oh, he was a wheel then.

FH: Democrat.

NASSER: Oh, yeah. He cracked the whip. Um hm.

FH: And . . .

NASSER: Tom Brady, he was on 3rd Street.

FH: What about the Hinkydink?

THIRD PARTY: (barely audible) Hinkydink is Frank Hess'.  
It was on Wabash. Right across from the courthouse.

FH: That was Frank Hess?

THIRD PARTY: That's right.

FH: Now, didn't he have diamonds in his teeth?

THIRD PARTY: Well, that's what Monte said. I never  
seen any diamonds.

NASSER: Well, I saw a black gal that used to come in my Uncle Mike's store there on 2nd Street . . .

THIRD PARTY: There was a colored gal . . . I remember the colored gal.

NASSER: . . . and when she'd smile, it just glistened, sparkled. And I thought boy! -- being a kid, you know, it got me -- a black gal with diamonds sparkling. And my Uncle Mike had a store (laughs) there right next to McGinty's, just south of McGinty's. McGinty was on the corner, and my Uncle Mike had a store just south of him. And he practically opened 20 hours out of 24. That's the reason he died so young.

FH: Well, McGinty's also had a grocery, didn't they?

NASSER: No.

FH: Just the saloon? Did they live there?

NASSER: Yes. It was all one building. What was her name? I don't recall her name.

FH: Now, besides the houses of prostitution and saloons on 3rd Street, people lived there. The Ellises . . .

THIRD PARTY: Not the Ellises.

NASSER: We lived on 3rd! We lived at . . . yeah, Alex Corey and we lived there, all in the 200 block. Sam Nasser lived there, right across the street.

FH: In the 200 block of what?

NASSER: North 3rd.

FH: North 3rd.

NASSER: Yeah.

FH: So, it was a good residential district in there.

NASSER: Oh, yeah. Yes.

FH: As well as being the houses . . .

NASSER:               You take practically west . . . yeah, west of 3rd Street was quite a few of those prostitutes.

FH:                   Well, weren't the black houses mostly on 1st Street?

NASSER:               Well, they were mixed along in there.

FH:                   They were all mixed up?

NASSER:               The original . . . yeah. The original Madam Brown wasn't Edith Brown. That was a black woman. She was on Eagle Street. She was the Madam Brown, the original Madam Brown. But she was between 1st and 2nd Street on Eagle on the north side of the street. And it had . . . I remember the house. It was a two-story frame, and there was an upstairs like a balcony porch and one downstairs. I can remember that just as plain. And, of course, there was a saloon right there on that corner, on 1st and Eagle on the southeast corner.

THIRD PARTY:               (almost a whisper) Billy Lockhart.

NASSER:               Lockhart?

THIRD PARTY:               Billy Lockhart.

NASSER:               Billy Lockhart. And then there were two houses . . . small shotgun houses -- two or three. Then this big two-story frame where Madam Brown -- the original Madam Brown lived. Then later on, years later, that yellow brick there at 2nd and Mulberry was Edith Brown; and she went by the name of Madam Brown. This other one eventually died. And it was a two-story yellow brick; and they had . . . all these big shots, you know, would have their chauffeurs drive them in the back. They had lattice work; you couldn't tell who was there.

                    Originally, it used to be horses and wagons. And they'd all go in the back end of the house there, and nobody knew the difference.

FH.                   Now, the black Madam Brown had a black house?

NASSER: Well, I can't tell you about the girls that worked there, whether they were black or white.

FH: Well, did the black houses take white men?

NASSER: Oh, yes!

FH: But the white houses didn't take black men?

NASSER: Well, I couldn't say that. Wherever there was a buck, they were there. It didn't make any difference. A dollar's a dollar. If it was black or white, it didn't make any difference.

FH: Do you know how much they charged in the early days?

NASSER: Well, say what'd they used to pay you?  
(laughs)

FH: (laughs) Was it like 50 cents?

NASSER: Oh, I couldn't say. I imagine so. Fifty or a dollar, huh?

THIRD PARTY: (in low voice) Two dollars.

NASSER: Dollar? Two?

FH: I think it was two dollars for years, wasn't it?

NASSER: I would think so, yeah.

FH: Well, then did Edith Brown finally get up to ten or twenty dollars?

NASSER: Oh, she only had the best clientele. She catered only to the best. Had mirrors along the wall. Some big shot would go in there, you know. And they'd . . .

THIRD PARTY: Them gals were beautiful.

NASSER: They were. They weren't . . .

FH: They were beautiful girls?

NASSER: Oh, you'd better believe it! They had the thin negligee on.

THIRD PARTY: (simultaneously) She dressed them like dolls, too.

NASSER: Primp . . . primp around, redhead, brunettes, blonds, you name it. You pick your choice. Now what the fee was . . . it could have been ten, fifteen, twenty dollars. I don't know.

THIRD PARTY: It'd depend on who you are.

NASSER: Yeah.

DH: But once you got in the house, other men in there knew you were there? I mean it wasn't any secret that you'd gone to a house of prostitution?

NASSER: Oh, well, no. No, no, no. It didn't operate that way.

THIRD PARTY: No. No, no. Hm um. No, no.

NASSER: Nobody knew . . . the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing. No, no. No. That was . . . it was hush-hush.

FH: Well, but if the girls paraded in one big room and the men were in there, didn't . . .

NASSER: Only one man at a time. And he took his choice. Do you follow me?

FH: Yep.

NASSER: Say I wanted a redhead. All right, I'll pick a readhead. I'm not going to pick any blond or brunette. Or vice versa. I might want a brunette. So you take your choice and she takes you to the room.

FH: Well, now while you were waiting to go to the room, she had a lounge where you could have a drink, didn't she?

NASSER: I don't recall that. (aside) Do you?

FH: As I recall . . . I understood that she had a . . . the bar from the old Prairie House in there.

NASSER: It could be. It's possible.

My experience along those lines was when I delivered in that vicinity. And there's one thing about it. A lot of people kind of make . . . think well . . .

THIRD PARTY: Until they got to know you more.

NASSER: They . . . no, they never made a pass at you. They never made a pass at you. I've seen ladies come in my dad's store that worked on the line, dressed in decent clothing, nothing flashy. And I've seen them come from the better end of town, all fixed up -- painted, rouged, lipstick, mascara, you name it -- flipping around there. You'd think they were one of them. But the girl that really worked for that -- worked along the line there -- you'd never know that they were even hustling.

FH: But that wasn't all of it, was it? There were some that were sort of sleazy.

NASSER: Well, there were a few, yeah. But the majority of them . . . a lot of those girls were from out of town, you know. It was very seldom I ever heard of any local girl. They either were from Illinois or Chicago or St. Louis or someplace, you know. They got away from their hometowns so nobody would know the difference.

FH: And they paid their bills, didn't they?

NASSER: Oh, paid them right on the button. They bought the best. They never shirked around. They never . . . they even bought round steak and had it ground for their pets.

FH: Did most of the madams have pets?

NASSER: Oh, the majority of them did. Back then it was silk poodles. Wasn't that the rage?



THIRD PARTY: Um hm.

NASSER: Silk poodles.

THIRD PARTY: Silk poodles and men.

NASSER: Yeah, men. (laughs) Yeah.  
But . . .

FH: Didn't they have pug dogs then?

NASSER: What kind?

FH: Pugs? What they called pug dogs. Looked like little bulldogs.

NASSER: Oh, yeah. There were bulldogs, pit bulls. And English bulls, yeah. Yeah, they had bulldogs but the most popular ones that I can remember as a kid was those silk poodles, and they kept them clean and tidy. They looked nice, really nice.

FH: Were they sort of like Pekingese?

NASSER: Well, similar. Similar but they were white, real white, weren't they, Carl? Remember them?

THIRD PARTY: No, I don't.

NASSER: You don't. Well, they were white, the ones I've seen. They were white dogs but they took care of their pets. Those girls did.

FH: Now, Edith had a pet cemetery in back of her place, didn't she?

NASSER: I heard she did now. I couldn't say for sure, but I heard she did.

FH: Well now, when Eddie Gosnell left the line . . . he had a saloon down there, I believe with Buster Clark. When he left the line, did he often come back down there? Was he friends with a lot people down there?

NASSER: Oh, yeah, he came back there. I used to hang around Eddie's stables. He had some beautiful horses, and I used to hang around the stables there. Gee, this is back during the

NASSER: jockey alley days, and I was crazy about horses. I still am. I like a good, pretty horse. And Eddie took a liking to me -- of course, I was a little shaver and he picked me up and put me on the back of that horse. Of course, he'd lead the horse around, and I thought that was the biggest thing in the world to ride on that pretty horse.

FH: Well, he didn't have any horses to race at the race track. They weren't race horses?

NASSER: Well, that I could not answer on that one. But he had some beautiful horses. He had his stable there right . . . just north of Cherry Street between 2nd and 3rd. And that house at one time . . . if I'm not mistaken, the stable was right behind that big, two-story brick home there; and that, later on, belonged to Maryann /Meharry/. She bought that. Now, if she bought it from . . . I don't know whether . . . who she did buy that from. I can't remember now.

FH: Well, he and Mickey Meharry were friends, weren't they?

NASSER: Oh, Mickey? Yeah. Mickey Meharry, yes.

FH: Well, now Mickey had horses, too, didn't he? Did he keep them at Eddie's?

NASSER: (simultaneously) Oh, Mickey, sure. Sure, he did. He had some nice horses.

But, oh, I tell you there were so many things that went on back then, they just don't all come to me. And that's the reason I brought whozzits here. I thought maybe he (laughs) could help me, see. But . . .

THIRD PARTY: I'm not old enough.

NASSER: No, I know you're not old enough. (laughs)

FH: Did you ride the trains much in those days?

NASSER: Ah, (laughs) no, I didn't really.

FH: Did you ride the interurbans?

NASSER: Interurbans, yes. Streetcars, yes.

FH: Did you take rides on Sunday afternoon on the streetcars?

NASSER: I usually went out to the dances on the streetcars back in the early '20s.

FH: Where? At the Trianon?

NASSER: The Trianon was one. Summer Garden was the other one.

FH: Did you go to Tokyo?

NASSER: Tokyo was on South 8th Street.

FH: Winter Garden?

NASSER: Winter Garden, Orpheum, Graystone . . .

FH: Where was the Graystone?

NASSER: Right there where the Orpheum was. They changed the name. Yeah.

I went to Paris, Illinois -- Twin Lakes.

FH: Ray Park?

NASSER: Ray Park, Elm Grove, Forest Park . . .

FH: Everybody liked to dance in those days, didn't they?

NASSER: Everybody danced. And they're not like they're doing now. You don't know who (laughs) you're dancing with. You don't know whether you're dancing with a man or a woman.

But anyhow, back then it was a different style of dancing. It was cheek-to-cheek then.

FH: Held them close.

NASSER: Yeeaaaah. Oh, my God, dance on a dime and get nine cents change! Absolutely! Yeah, that was dancing then. The old fox trot, the one-step, the two-step . . .

FH:                   The camel walk.

NASSER:             . . . camel walk and the charleston, the  
black bottom . . .

FH:                   Did you jitterbug?

NASSER:             . . . jitterbug, you-name-it. Name some-  
thing we haven't done.

FH:                   What name bands do you remember coming in  
here?

NASSER:             Ben Bernie . . . Ben Bernie and Shep  
Fields and . . .

THIRD PARTY:        Jan Garber.

NASSER:             . . . Jan Garber . . .

FH:                   Who was it who said, "Is everybody happy"?

NASSER:             Yeah, that's Ben Bernie. Isn't that Ben  
Bernie?

FH:                   That was Ted Weems, wasn't it?

NASSER:             No, no. Ted Weems is right.

THIRD PARTY:        It was Ted Weems.

NASSER:             Yeah, you're right. I'm trying to think  
of a lot of those bands.

THIRD PARTY:        We had 'em all here.

NASSER:             Oh, that's when Trianon opened up, and  
they got some big bands here.

FH:                   Were they all at the Trianon?

NASSER:             Most of them. Yeah, that's the only good  
dance pavilion we had. We had a lot of dance  
halls, but the Trianon was the top of all of  
them.

FH:                   What were the other dance halls? I mean  
there were dancing schools where they had dances.

NASSER: Oh, yes. You had Reid Marlatt. And you had Bill Schomer . . . William Schomer.

THIRD PARTY: Schomer, yeah.

NASSER: And . . . let's see, there was another one there.

THIRD PARTY: You had the Summer Garden. You could dance out there.

NASSER: No. We're talking about schools then. Schools . . .

THIRD PARTY: Ernestine Myers.

NASSER: Well, she taught the different type, too.

THIRD PARTY: What's the name of that guy from Sullivan who used to be . . .

NASSER: Oh, Fred Bays. Fred Bays, he was with Ernestine. They danced as a team. But that's about as much as I know about the dancing.

I could tell you a lot more, but, of course, it'd be stepping on personal property.

THIRD PARTY: (laughs heartily)

FH: Did you ever like to gamble a little bit?

NASSER: I never did gamble.

FH: Do you know much about the gambling around here?

NASSER: Hm um.

FH: What was the Trianon like? What was . . . it was a big building?

NASSER: Oh, yes, a good-sized building. I can't tell you just exactly how big it would be.

FH: Didn't it have sides that let up in the summertime?

NASSER: I don't think so.

THIRD PARTY: Side that let up?

NASSER: Yeah, for like in the summertime, like open air dancing.

THIRD PARTY: There was a big fence out there.

NASSER: They did have an outdoor . . .

THIRD PARTY: (simultaneously) And it was called the moonlight floor.

FH: Outside the building?

THIRD PARTY: Yes.

NASSER: Yeah. It seemed like there . . .

THIRD PARTY: Yeah, there was no air-conditioning in them days.

NASSER: No, huh-uh.

THIRD PARTY: You danced outside.

NASSER: Um hm.

THIRD PARTY: It was called moonlight floor. Then in the cold weather they went inside.

FH: Do you remember much about the political scandals here of Donn Roberts and . . .

NASSER: No, I was a young . . . pretty young at the time.

THIRD PARTY: I remember them talking about it.

NASSER: That's the only thing we know about that.

In fact, his daughter taught me in grade school. Donn Roberts's wife . . . or daughter, rather. And he was mayor before that, even before I was going to grade school to his daughter at Hook -- Jim Hook School.

FH: What did these different mayors feel . . . how did they feel about the red light district and the saloons and the gambling here?

THIRD PARTY: They were all for it.

FH: They were for it?

THIRD PARTY: They had some good points.

FH: You feel that the red light district was, in a way, a good thing?

NASSER: Yes, if it's . . .

THIRD PARTY: You mean an asset to the city?

FH: Yes.

THIRD PARTY: Sure.

NASSER: You would have less murders and rapes and everything else if they had it and kept it under control. Years ago they used to . . . the girls would have to be checked once a week. And they would have to have a certificate by the doctor on the wall. And I think the red light district was an asset to any community of any size. A lot of people frown on that, but they're absolutely wrong. They're just sticking their head in the sand and letting their hind end show. But actually, it cuts down a lot of criminal activities.

FH: You think it cuts down venereal disease, too?

NASSER: You'd better believe it! This way here, you don't know. You pick up somebody . . . any gal that's sitting in a motel or lobby someplace, you know, and she's on the make. How do you know who she's been with? How do you know whether she's clean or not?

FH: Well, you didn't really know in those days.

NASSER: No. The old saying is . . . of course, the young fellow you know . . . yeah . . .

THIRD PARTY: You get that certificate from the doctor and put it on the wall of the room that she . . .

NASSER: Yeah.

FH: Do you think Terre Haute's red light district was any bigger or rougher than in other cities this size or larger?

NASSER: No. No. We would live in the west end of town, and we never locked our doors. We never bolted our windows. And you could walk down in the red light district and never have to be afraid anybody was going to hit you in the head or cut your throat.

FH: But there were muggings.

NASSER: But very few. Not like they are today. Boy, you don't pick up a paper unless there's a murder here, murder there, and boy, oh boy, oh boy. And I don't know what it is -- whether it's television that's promoted a lot of this or what it is. Or people's got more money or greedy or something. What it is, I couldn't pinpoint it. But I do know that we never did lock our doors. And we lived in the west end.

FH: Now, there were other businesses down there. Ermisches had a store down there, didn't they?

NASSER: Ermisch had a dry-cleaning place. They were right next to Beecher Cromwell's building there.

FH: And what other businesses were there?

NASSER: Oh, there were second-hand stores, a lot of Jewish people in the north side of . . .

THIRD PARTY: Temple Laundry.

NASSER: Oh, yes. Temple Laundry was there. And then there was . . . what was that there at 6th and Eagle? Or at 6th and Cherry . . . they tore it down -- Columbian? Columbian Laundry?

FH: Columbian Laundry.

NASSER: Yeah, right there. And . . . see, there's so many different things that just brush the cobwebs out; it all comes back to you.

FH: Where did the boys come from -- the poor



FH: boys come from in that area that . . . when they started the Boys' Club? It must have been that there were a lot of poor boys down in that area.

NASSER: The Boys' Club was across the street from the courthouse on South 3rd Street.

FH: Originally?

NASSER: That's the original, upstairs.

FH: Then in the '20s . . .

NASSER: That's back then.

FH: . . . they built it up on North 3rd?

NASSER: Was that in the '20s?

THIRD PARTY: It might have been the late '20s.

NASSER: It could have been about the late '20s.

FH: Well, where did those boys come from? Was there a poor area around there?

THIRD PARTY: Sandburr Hollow, right down the street . . . just north of there a little bit.

FH: Where was Sandburr Hollow?

NASSER: Sandburr Hollow, down by the river.

THIRD PARTY: Indiana State /University/ has bought all that property down there and tore it up.

NASSER: Sandburr Hollow is right down in there.

THIRD PARTY: Do you know where 1st and Locust is? Well, from there west to the river and north is called Sandburr Hollow. And them kids went to school; they either went to Hook School or they went to Voorhees School.

FH: Now, that was south of the cemetery up there, the old cemetery.

NASSER: Yeah, yeah, Woodlawn.  
THIRD PARTY: West of the cemetery.  
NASSER: South of Woodlawn.  
FH: How was that spelled? S-a-n-d- . . .  
THIRD PARTY: Sand'burr Hollow.  
FH: B-u-double r?  
THIRD PARTY: That's right. Sandburr Hollow.  
FH: Sand'burr. Where'd it get that name?  
NASSER: It goes a way back, I guess. I don't know.  
THIRD PARTY: A lot of people lived down in there, too.  
You'd be surprised.  
FH: They weren't all poor?  
THIRD PARTY: Well, there's some that were well-to-do.  
FH: Still lived in Sandburr Hollow?  
THIRD PARTY: Still lived in Sandburr Hollow, yeah. You  
know, Joe O'Mara lived down there until he died.  
NASSER: Yeah. O'Mara, uh-huh. He was quite a  
political figure, too. But there was a lot of  
. . . they didn't necessarily have to be the  
real . . .  
THIRD PARTY: Then they came from over at . . .  
NASSER: Taylorville.  
THIRD PARTY: Taylorville was a big source.  
FH: And Dresser?  
NASSER: Yeah.  
THIRD PARTY: Well, that's it!  
NASSER: That's the one! Same thing.

THIRD PARTY: Dresser and Taylorville are the same thing.

NASSER: Yeah, we all went to the club there because they had basketball, a nice gymnasium, and things we could do. You know, [it would] keep us off the street.

FH: It wasn't all poor boys?

NASSER: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. No, it could be anybody. Anybody was allowed to go there.

Flora Gulick was the one that started that. Flora Gulick, did you ever hear of that name? And . . .

THIRD PARTY: Her boys' club.

NASSER: . . . yeah. Nichols, Les Nichols. Wasn't that Les Nichols, he was the director there for years and years and years.

FH: Did the madams and the girls contribute to the Boys' Club and did the saloons?

NASSER: They were very, very liberal with their donations.

THIRD PARTY: Yes. Pretty good.

NASSER: Yeah, they were very liberal. Yeah.

FH: How do you analyze a woman who becomes a madam or prostitute? I mean, they are tough but other than being tough because they have to be in their business.

NASSER. Well . . . well, in a way it's just like running any other business. When you're in business -- I don't care whether it's that type of business or in a food business or furniture business -- you gotta be stern and firm. Not that you want to be mean. It's not the idea of being mean. It's just the idea you've been in the business, you run it like a business person. You don't run it like a playhouse.

FH: But I understand most of them gave away

FH: most of their money or somebody got it away from them, and they usually ended up broke.

NASSER: Well, the only thing I know about some of them -- a few of them, not most of them -- a few of them would get a shine on a guy. And men are just as bad as some women when it comes to gold digging.

FH: Sure they are!

NASSER: You know, it works both ways. They'd find some weakness on . . . if I find a woman that's weak and I can get her for a few hundred bucks or something like that, I'm gonna do it and vice versa. A woman finds a sucker in a man, she's going to take him, too. So I don't really think the majority of them were mean. They weren't mean. They were business people.

FH: Do you remember what all was downtown that was outstanding to you in your life? I mean theaters or special stores?

NASSER: (laughs) Well, the only thing I know was the Fountain theater and the Savoy . . . the Fountain and the Savoy and what was that . . . Princess? And the . . .

THIRD PARTY: Lois.

NASSER: Oh, and the Lois airdome and the Young's airdome and the Rex . . .

THIRD PARTY: Yeah, but the Lois was a burlesque.

NASSER: It was a stage show.

FH: Lois?

NASSER: Lois.

FH: Where was that?

NASSER: Fifth and Cherry.

THIRD PARTY: Fifth and Cherry.

NASSER: On the . . . where that parking lot is.

FH: Did they regularly have burlesque shows there?

NASSER: Yeah! They had impersonators there. They'd get up there and . . . like Charlie Chaplin impersonators and different ones like that. I remember it had sand floors. There was no . . . and benches.

THIRD PARTY: It was right on the ground.

NASSER: Many times I cut my feet in that sand. Somebody had broken a bottle and . . . (laughs)

FH: Now, Young's airdome was on Ohio Street, wasn't it?

NASSER: That's right. Yes. It's that white brick front there. It's still there.

FH: Mr. Nasser, where'd you go to school?

NASSER: I went to Jim Hook School on 4th and . . . or yeah, 4th and Mulberry.

FH: That was torn down some years . . .

NASSER: Yeah. Uh-huh.

FH: . . . ago, wasn't it? And where did you play? Were there places around there to play in?

NASSER: Yeah, they had a yard to play in.

FH: I mean other . . . were there other yards you played . . . well, kids didn't play baseball then, did they?

NASSER: Oh, yeah. They played baseball.

THIRD PARTY: (whispering) Sure, they played baseball.

NASSER: Yeah, played mumblepeg, marbles, skip the rope -- you name it.

FH: Were there parks around there?

THIRD PARTY: (whispering) Parsons Field.

NASSER: Yeah. Parsons Field.

THIRD PARTY: Belongs to Indiana State now.

NASSER: Yeah, they took it over.

THIRD PARTY: Normal, then.

NASSER: Yeah, State Normal [Teachers College].

FH: Yeah, but that wasn't there to play in.

NASSER: Oh, yes! It was there. Yeah, they played football there and they played baseball there. Sure!

FH: Were there parks down in that area?

NASSER: No, there wasn't any park. That's the only thing that was there.

FH: Well now, what did you do at the Boys' Club?

NASSER: Oh, played basketball and prizefight and stuff like that. Whatever they have in gyms. You know what they have in gyms.

THIRD PARTY: Keeping them off the street was the main thing.

NASSER: Yeah, that's right.

FH: Did they have people who taught you there? Did they have a staff?

NASSER: Oh, oh, yeah, they had . . . I wouldn't say they had a staff, but they had somebody there to teach you the rights and wrongs, you know. They didn't just let you go haphazard. No, they taught you the right thing.

FH: What hours were they open?

NASSER: Well, let's see. What hours were they, Carl? I don't recall now.

THIRD PARTY: About 9 to 9.

NASSER: Is that the way it was?

THIRD PARTY:           Something like that -- about 9 to 9.

NASSER:                About 9 to 9, that's 12 hours.

FH:                    Would they let black boys in?

NASSER:                Oh, sure! Um hm.

FH:                    Now, where'd the girls play?

THIRD PARTY:           Didn't play.

NASSER:                Not with them; not there.

THIRD PARTY:           It was the Boys' Club

FH:                    But I mean, was there a place for girls?  
The Girls' Club wasn't organized then.

NASSER:                No, huh-uh. I can't recall that.

THIRD PARTY:           We never found it. (laughter)

NASSER:                Huh-uh. No, we . . . this was mostly all  
boys. There were no girls.

THIRD PARTY:           Let's see. Where did the girls . . . there  
was a social settlement place down there called  
Social Settlement. That's where the girls would  
go, right next to old Mose Nasser's -- a little  
store there.

FH:                    Was it on North 4th?

THIRD PARTY:           North 4th.

NASSER:                Was that ol' Frank Freije's home?

THIRD PARTY:           Yeah, that's right.

NASSER:                Ooooh.

FH:                    Well now, do you belong to St. George  
Church?

NASSER:                I belong to St. Stephen's.

FH:                    St. Stephen's.

NASSER: We're Episcopalians. He's St. George.

FH: (addressing third party) You're St. George?

THIRD PARTY: Uh-huh.

FH: How long has St. George Church been here?

THIRD PARTY: Since '27.

FH: Since 1927. And you've always belonged to St. Stephen's?

NASSER: Ever since my dad came to Terre Haute, 1909.

FH: What do you know about the early German community here? There were a lot of Germans here.

NASSER: Yes, there was but I don't know a whole lot about them. No, I don't know a whole lot about them.

FH: Well now, what were the occupations of different people who came in here from other countries? What did the Irish do? There were a lot of Irish.

NASSER: Yeah, there was.

THIRD PARTY: Railroaders.

FH: The Irish were railroaders.

THIRD PARTY: And policemen.

FH: The Welsh were digging the mines, weren't they?

THIRD PARTY: The Welsh worked in the mines.

NASSER: Mines. Back then, coal mines was one of the main industries of this area. Coal mines and /it/ used to be a railroad center, too, Terre Haute did. You had railroads running in all directions out of Terre Haute back then. But that's all practically done now. You only got a few railroads . . . two of them now, aren't there? Running through here?



THIRD PARTY:           Yeah.

FH:                    What did the Italians do?

NASSER:               Italians? Well, I don't know what they  
                      did do.

THIRD PARTY:           They worked in mines up in Clinton . . . .

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 1-SIDE 2

FH:                    Did you go to high school?

NASSER:               I went three years to Wiley High School.  
                      And the teacher got smart with me and I walked  
                      out.

FH:                    What did you do when you walked out?

NASSER:               She told me to go to the dean's office.  
                      And I had a friend same nationality as I am, and  
                      she called me a name. And he said, "That's what  
                      he is. That's what I am and I'm walking out with  
                      him." And we both walked out of school at the  
                      same time.

FH:                    Did you ever go back?

NASSER:               No. The only time I went back is (laughs)  
                      when my daughter taught there.

FH:                    Did your family make you go to work then?

NASSER:               They didn't make me. I wanted to work.

FH:                    What'd you do?

NASSER:               I worked in my dad's grocery store.

FH:                    What did the Jewish community do? What  
                      business were most of them in?

NASSER:               They were in the clothing business, furni-  
                      ture business, and junk business. That's mostly  
                      their kind of work. (addressing third party)  
                      Wasn't that about right?

THIRD PARTY: Second-hand.

FH: Wasn't it easier to make money then than it is now?

NASSER: A lot easier and didn't have all these crazy taxes that these politicians are putting on us.

I hope you send that to Washington.

FH: Do you think most people saved their money more then that they do now?

NASSER: Well, yes. If they saved a hundred dollars, they thought they were rich. Today a hundred dollars won't last you one night's fling.

FH: Now, things used to be delivered then, too, didn't they?

NASSER: Oh, yes.

FH: You could go down, didn't have to cart everything home yourself?

NASSER: That's right.

FH: Now like you . . . all the groceries you sold . . . most of the groceries you sold . . .

NASSER: We delivered.

FH: (simultaneously) . . . you delivered.

NASSER: Right.

FH: And did you have charge accounts for people?

NASSER: Oh, sure! Sure, we had charge accounts.

FH: Did you have trouble collecting then?

NASSER: Very few back then. Very few. Most of them paid.

FH: Did you barter with people or was there just a set price and that was it?

NASSER: No, just a set price.

FH: Well, I mean if they said, "I want 10 dozen of these."

NASSER: Oh, you'd shade the price, naturally. You'd give them a break on volume. Yeah, if a guy come in and wanted to buy one can of beans, he wouldn't get . . . you wouldn't charge him a case price for . . . or if he wanted a case, you wouldn't charge him the price of one single can for a case. So you'd give him a break.

FH: Now, what about the Depression? How did this affect you and your family and your business?

NASSER: Well, that's when tomatoes was cheaper and potatoes was cheaper. And that's the time Little Nell and I fell in love. (laughs heartily)

I was making eight dollars a week back then.

FH: Did you live on it?

NASSER: I sure did!

FH: How much was your grocery bill? Well, you got your groceries for nothing.

NASSER: I got my groceries from my dad. And my dad gave us an apartment, a three-room apartment with bath. She was 16 years old when we got married. I'm not going to tell you how old I was.

FH: Did you have children right quick?

NASSER: Well, it was almost five years before we named our child. (laughs) No, we were . . .

FH: What I mean is, most people during the Depression did not have so many children because they couldn't afford them.

NASSER: Well, we just had the one girl.

FH: And you still got along on eight dollars a week?

NASSER: Yeah. Yeah. In fact, my wife got a job with the Coca Cola Company. And every week she got her paycheck, she was broke because she had to pay for her laundry and her garments and her lunch out of that salary she got from the Coca Cola Company. And she'd always say, "Paul, I need a couple of dollars." I'd say, "What the hell'd you do . . . what'd you do with your money?" "Oh, I had to do this and I had to do that and I had to do this." I'd say, "O.K." Well, what are you going to do?

FH: When things were delivered then, how were they delivered? Like way back, you . . .

NASSER: Well, back then it was horse and wagon deliveries -- until the automobiles come in later on in years. Then they had delivery in auto-trucks. You know, regular trucks like they got today, you know.

FH: Was the vegetable man who went up and down the alley competition?

NASSER: Not much. Hm um. No. I'd get up 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock in the morning with my dad. And I'd take him to the market. And we'd pick out all of our produce while it's just fresh, before it's all picked over.

FH: This is the open market?

NASSER: Open market. And I'd put 'em in the truck and we'd bring 'em up to the store. And I'd have them in the store. Then my older brothers would come in around 7 o'clock that morning or 8, and they'd take over from there. And my dad and I would go on home after we did that shopping early in the morning.

FH: And then come back later in the day?

NASSER: Yeah, later in the day. Yeah. We alternated. Back and forth.

FH: Did you have women working in your grocery?

NASSER: Once in a while. Once in a while.

FH: Did many women work then?

NASSER: Well, not a whole lot back then. There was some, but not too many.

FH: What . . . when they did work, what was their occupation -- clerks or . . .

NASSER: Yeah, clerks. Yeah. Um hm.

FH: In the factories?

NASSER: Well, I don't know about the factory part. Women didn't work much in factories then.

THIRD PARTY: Didn't work at all then.

NASSER: Huh-uh. Most of them were homebodies. Of course, this is all new this here . . .

THIRD PARTY: Going back 60 years.

NASSER: Yeah, that's 60 years or better. Yeah.

FH: If a woman wanted to get a job, she really didn't have much of anyplace to look, did she?

NASSER: Not much of a chance. Hm um. Used to be years ago . . . used to be you'd go to a bank and all the tellers were men. Now you go to the bank, they're all women.

FH: If you were having a bad time in your grocery and needed some money to carry you over, were the banks lenient with you?

NASSER: Well, I never had that kind of a time myself. I was very fortunate. But my dad had borrowed money from the old McKeen National Bank that used to be there at 6th and Wabash. He'd go in there and ask Mr. McKeen for a \$500 loan, and he'd pay him back in 30 or 90 or 60 days or whatever. Mr. McKeen'd say, "All right, Uncle George, I'll go get it for you." He'd go get him \$500 and no signature or nothing back then.

FH: He didn't have to have much security or anything else?

NASSER: No.

FH: It was all in good faith, wasn't it?

NASSER: Um hm.

FH: Well now, wasn't that part of what got the banks in trouble when the crash came?

NASSER: Well, no. This was 'way before that. This was 'way before that.

FH: But even at the time of the crash during the Depression, banks did business pretty much on faith, didn't they?

NASSER: Well, no. You had to . . .

THIRD PARTY: Well, everybody did!

NASSER: Yeah. But you had to sign papers too about that time. Yeah, you did. But I'm going back to when my dad got credit without a signature; that is back before World War I. Now you're going now just before World War . . . or back in the late '20s and early '30s. Now, things have changed quite a bit . . .

THIRD PARTY: Before Roosevelt came in.

NASSER: Yeah, FDR. Yes.

FH: Do you feel that the Depression came to Terre Haute a little earlier than it did most places on account of the mines?

NASSER: No, I can't say that it did. Huh-uh. Not any quicker.

FH: Didn't it start hurting here in '29, before the crash?

NASSER: Well, they felt the slump back in the late '20s, that's true. But it wasn't too severe. It wasn't too severe. Maybe I'm talking because we didn't have it that bad. Now, maybe some other people did. But . . . I don't know. My parents were very economical, you know. And we were taught that from infancy, to be very conservative. I don't mean to be tightwads or anything like that, but I mean, you know, spend money where money's well spent.

FH: Did the churches have a big influence on

FH: the families? Were they the center of life, family life when you were young?

NASSER: Well, yes, I would say so. Um hm. More so, I think, than it is today, personally.

FH: What did the families do other than their activities at the churches for entertainment? Did men get together and women get together? Or did whole families get together?

NASSER: Well, I think it was more everybody got together at the same time, women and men as well. Like take your wife or your husband and so forth, you know, and all go to the meetings or whatever reception they had, you know, dinners or what-not. But I don't see there's much difference actually a whole lot. Now you got some churches that really put on big receptions. Like the orthodox church here. Now they have big affairs there quite often. In fact, what they . . .

FH: They always have?

NASSER: They usually have nice big affairs.

FH: I mean they always have?

NASSER: Yeah.

THIRD PARTY: Usually, two or three a month. You take people active in the church.

NASSER: You take . . . now like once in a while, they'll have an ice cream social or something like that, you know.

THIRD PARTY: And they have dinners.

NASSER: And dinners, you name it. And once in a while some of them will throw a dance, you know, a dinner-dance, or something like that in their recreation hall.

FH: They really supported their church?

NASSER: Oh, yeah!

FH: What about labor then? Do you remember . . .  
did you know Eugene V. Debs?

NASSER: No, I didn't know him. All I know is what  
I've heard of him. I didn't know him.

FH: There was not a lot of labor activity  
around here early on, was there?

NASSER: No. No, we didn't have much of that. In  
fact, there wasn't a whole lot of unions to talk  
about back then. See, this all come up under FDR.

FH: The unions?

NASSER: Yeah. The majority of them.

FH: Well, Debs was before FDR.

NASSER: Yes. Yes. But I mean it got good hold  
after FDR.

THIRD PARTY: Yeah, he was a good man. I can remember  
Debs.

FH: (addressing third party) You remember  
Debs?

THIRD PARTY: I remember seeing him,. They'd say, "Oh,  
that's Mr. Debs." He lived right down here on  
8th Street, or 9th, North 8th or North 9th?

NASSER: North 8th, I believe, Carl.

THIRD PARTY: North 8th?

NASSER: Um hm.

FH: Were you ashamed to admit that you knew  
Debs?

NASSER &  
THIRD PARTY: (in unison) No, no, no, no.

THIRD PARTY: Debs was a good man.

NASSER: No. No, we weren't ashamed.

THIRD PARTY: They made a mistake when they . . . he



THIRD PARTY: went to prison, you know? They made a mistake.

FH: People respected Debs.

THIRD PARTY: Oh, yes. Yes. He was a good man, a well-liked man.

NASSER: He was . . . he was pretty sharp -- sharp man. But most of the unions . . .

THIRD PARTY: He was no more socialist than what's been around here in the presidents, in the last few presidents we've had. He's not any more socialist than they were.

FH: You feel that he was really ahead of his time?

THIRD PARTY: I believe he was.

NASSER: Yeah, 'way ahead.

FH: What do you remember about early radio in Terre Haute?

NASSER: Early radio? The only thing I remember was the crystal set. You had a battery and a dry-cell battery and wet battery and . . .

THIRD PARTY: He had one of the first radios around town, this guy did. What was that? A Crosley or a Crosby or . . .

NASSER: No. That was . . . I want to say Atwater Kent, but it wasn't. It was a little crystal set and it had to run off of batteries. It didn't have electricity. And I'd have it turned on and the later I'd stay up, the better reception I got. It'd be KDKA Pittsburgh. And I'd get that there dance band out of Pennsylvania, and then I got the idea . . . my mother was always in the kitchen cooking. I got the idea, "By God, I'm going to get a speaker and put it out there in the kitchen for my mom." So, I run a wire from my bedroom clear through the house into the kitchen and put that speaker up there, and I turned that radio on for her. She thought that was the greatest thing in the world. And I did, too. (laughs)

FH: Did you build your own radio?

NASSER: No, I didn't build it. I bought it.

FH: A lot of people did then.

NASSER: Oh, yes. Yeah, um hm.

FH: What changes do you see over the years in Terre Haute? I mean that seem to impress you that have either gone uphill or downhill.

NASSER: Well, I think Terre Haute's advanced quite a bit myself, personally. But population-wise, I don't think we've advanced any. I don't think so.

At one time, Terre Haute was about the size it is now, and that was back in the early '20s. Terre Haute was one of the largest cities in the state.

THIRD PARTY: Second city. It was the second city!

NASSER: Was it the second city? Indianapolis was one.

THIRD PARTY: That's right. We were the second city.

NASSER: Now . . . now, when my dad left Fort Wayne, it was a smaller town than Terre Haute. Now it's twice as big as Terre Haute or more.

FH: To what do you attribute that?

NASSER: Well, I don't know whether it's the Chamber of Commerce or what it is. I couldn't tell you. Something's wrong in Terre Haute that they don't have more industry -- something that would employ a lot of people. I don't mean get a factory in here that'll employ 10,000-5,000, 'cause if once it goes down, you're hurting. But I mean smaller factories where they employ say a couple hundred people or five hundred and different kinds of businesses.

FH: Do you think there was an attempt to keep them out because of unions in the . . .

NASSER: Well, Terre Haute has had a bad name for

NASSER: that.

THIRD PARTY: Were you here in '36?

NASSER: When they had the general strike?

THIRD PARTY: They had the general strike.

FH: But I mean, do you think that local people kept factories out because they were union factories and paid high wages because wages in Terre Haute have always been low.

NASSER: Yes, they have. And that's why a lot of our young generation leaves Terre Haute. They get their education here and next thing you know, they're gone.

FH: What do you remember about the general strike? Did you . . .

NASSER: I had a grocery store there on Crawford Street.

FH: Where on Crawford?

NASSER: Between 23rd and 24th Street on Crawford. And I was waiting on the trade at the time, and here pulled up two big cars and some bunch of thugs come out. And I mean thugs. They walked in the door (laughs) and they says, "Well, you gonna close 'er up or what are you going to do?" Well, my God, I looked at them giants and I thought "God, they'd make mincemeat outta me." So, I thought, "Well, what do you want me to do?" /They said,/ "Want you to lock 'er up. Lock that door and don't let nobody in, but those that's in here, let 'em out when they get through shopping." That's what I did.

FH: Were they local men?

NASSER: No, they had to be out of town.

FH: Do you think all the trouble there was caused from bringing in goons? Strikebreakers?

NASSER: Well, I don't know about that. I couldn't answer that.

THIRD PARTY: It all depends on whose side you're on.

NASSER: Yeah.

THIRD PARTY: If you was for the labor or if you was . . .

NASSER: Of course, we've always . . . naturally we all depend on the working man. If it wasn't for the working man, we wouldn't have nothing. And the man that works is the guy that spends the money. The guy that's got it, he just sits back and clips coupons. But the guy here that's raising a family of two, three, four, five children, /if/ he works, makes good money, he's going to buy food, clothing, you name it. Schooling . . . it takes money for that. And they're the people that keep the economy going.

FH: In the long run the volume of business is much more important than one good customer. Than one rich customer.

NASSER: Well . . . well, I wouldn't put it that way. No, I wouldn't put it that way exactly. That's . . . (laughs) I think that's too one-sided. We need a volume of business. Any type of business needs a volume. You don't want one guy come in here if he's a millionaire . . . come in once a year and buy a few things, you know. And then he wants to get you down to the nitty-gritty. With a guy -- everyday guy -- that's working every day, he'll come in. He don't even question your price, but he don't want to be robbed either. But he wants what he wants, and he comes in every day or once a week or twice a week. It's not once every six months or a year. So, you need that turnover to get anyplace.

FH: Now, you retired how long ago?

NASSER: Two and a half years ago.

FH: Were you glad to get out of business?

NASSER: In a way, yes, and in a way, no. I miss the people. I miss talking to people.

FH: And you're retired? What was your business?

THIRD PARTY: I was the city building inspector.

FH: Were you glad to retire, too?

THIRD PARTY: Well, I didn't have to retire. I wanted to do what I'm doing.

FH: You probably both worked more than 50 years and it was just time, right?

NASSER: Fifty? I'll say sixty.

THIRD PARTY: I didn't do a hell of a lot of hard work, though.

NASSER: Here's the guy that works hard, right here. That's the reason I'm in bad health. (all laugh)

THIRD PARTY: You heard what he said, he's the one that works hard.

FH: What about Prohibition? I presume you bend your elbow a little now and then.

THIRD PARTY: He knew every bootlegger in Vigo County.

NASSER: Aw, I knew a few of them.

THIRD PARTY: (chuckles)

FH: Let's hear who they were. George and Ann's.

NASSER: George and Ann's? Was there a George and Ann's?

FH: Springhill Road?

NASSER: No, I never . . . I didn't get that way. I went north. All my joints were north.

FH: Like Rex Club?

NASSER: Well, Rex Club, the Owl Inn, Kid Kayser, Charlie Willey (laughs) . . .

FH: Who was the one who had a leg off?

NASSER: Had a leg off?

FH: Out on Fort Harrison road.

NASSER:               Who had a leg off?  Somebody had a leg off, I didn't know?

FH:                   Ma Simpson?

NASSER:               There was a lot of joints.  But there's a lot of them I didn't know.  Of course, we sold a lot of stuff to make that stuff -- malt and stuff like that.

FH:                   What'd you sell?  Malt and yeast?

NASSER:               Malt, yeast.  And we had the jars, and we had the siphon hose and the caps and the capper.  What else?

FH:                   Did most people make just home brew in their . . . in Prohibition in their homes, or did they make wine?

NASSER:               No, they made . . . well, they made wine, too.  Everything.

THIRD PARTY:          They made everything really.

NASSER:               Anything that had alcohol in it.

THIRD PARTY:          Even whiskey.  They had whiskey in a keg.

NASSER:               They used to . . . used to be we'd get that corn sugar in 100-lb. bags; and you'd drive up to a beautiful home, beautiful shrubbery, hedge well trimmed, painted house, nice paint, looks immaculate.  You pull up in the back end.  This guy opens the door.  You go down in the basement.  In the basement you could eat off of the floor.  On the shelf . . . along the shelf there would be his copper kettle where he distilled this mule.  It was all vented through a chimney so the aroma wouldn't get in to the neighborhood.  It'd go right out in the . . . the wind would blow it all away.  You wouldn't get that odor.  And he had made some of the best whiskey you ever drank.  In fact, he made some apricot brandy for me.  And it was delicious.  I had . . .

FH:                   Well now, was he . . .

NASSER: . . . all the friends in the world then.

FH: . . . was he bootlegging?

NASSER: Who? Him? No, he drank for his own use.

FH: Oh.

NASSER: He bought the corn sugar by the 100-lb. bag. He had about 10 barrels of mash and this was all his own. He never sold a drop.

FH: Did he make wine, too?

NASSER: No, just the hard stuff. Mule.

FH: How about bathtub gin?

NASSER: Well, that's the same difference. All you do is add a little juniper flavor to that. That's all you do. Just take regular alcohol.

Now you're going to keep on, you're going to go in business. (laughs heartily)

FH: What about all the odors in the air around Terre Haute? Is that any better or worse?

NASSER: Naw, no. You couldn't tell it. You couldn't tell about the odors.

FH: You mean you can't tell about them?

THIRD PARTY: You mean today or then?

FH: Well, like the Commercial . . .

NASSER: You got more odor now than you had then.

FH: Well, you don't have the distilleries.

NASSER: Well, you never . . . I don't think I ever smelled too much of anything except from the . . .

THIRD PARTY. But you never lived in the south end of town.

NASSER: No, I didn't. I lived in the north end.

THIRD PARTY: It's pretty bad down there.

FH: What caused the odors? Commercial Solvents?

THIRD PARTY: Yeah.

FH: And the distillery?

THIRD PARTY: Well, I guess it was them. They said it was them. I knew there was an odor around there. I lived just a couple of blocks from there.

FH: But we still have odors in Terre Haute.

THIRD PARTY: Well, not like this.

NASSER: Aw, you got awful bad odors in Terre Haute.

THIRD PARTY: Any community. Any community.

NASSER: And . . . now, let's see. What else do we want to know?

FH: Are you sorry you stayed in Terre Haute?

NASSER: Who? Me?! Why, I got that Wabash River in my veins and I couldn't leave Terre Haute. You don't think I could leave Terre Haute, do you?

FH: (addressing third party) Are you sorry that you stayed here?

THIRD PARTY: Oh, no.

FH: Has it been good to you?

NASSER: Yes. Terribly.

FH: Thank you very much, both of you.

NASSER: O.K.

FH: Being interviewed.

NASSER: I'm sorry Monte wasn't here, 'cause Monte could have really . . . 'cause he's quite a bit older than Carl and I . . . .

THIRD PARTY: He's ten years older than us.



FH: Now that's Monte Hanna.

NASSER: Yeah.

FH: What did he do?

NASSER: Well, he worked on a cookie truck for a long . . . .

THIRD PARTY: He was a baker. He was a baker . . .

NASSER: Oh, yeah! Worked for Jerry . . .

THIRD PARTY: . . . for years.

NASSER: . . . Fitzgerald. That's right! He worked for Jerry Fitzgerald when Jerry had a bakery there on Ohio Street.

THIRD PARTY: (simultaneously) Ohio Street.

NASSER: Across from the courthouse.

THIRD PARTY: And he sold cookies around here for years.

NASSER: He sold cookies off a cookie truck.

THIRD PARTY: Continental Bakery.

NASSER: . . . for years. That's when Ward's and Hostess made store-to-store deliveries. Monte worked there. Then he worked for Sam Shahadey at 13th and . . .

THIRD PARTY: Then he ended up having his own store.

NASSER: . . . at 13th and Poplar. He worked for him for a long time. Then he turned around and, of course, he took over my dad's store after my dad passed away. Then when Jimmie came back from service, Jimmie took the store back. Then Monte went in business for himself.

FH: What about Jerry Fitzgerald? He was a pretty good guy, wasn't he?

NASSER: Jerry was one of the best men we had.

THIRD PARTY: Greatest guy that Terre Haute ever had!

NASSER: He turned around and he . . . when them coal miners would come out on the strike, he'd give them bread.

THIRD PARTY: Yeah, and they were callin' him a Catholic Irish so-and-so and . . .

NASSER: Yeah.

THIRD PARTY: . . . he'd send 'em a load of bread.

FH: Wasn't he a politician?

NASSER: Mr. Fitzgerald? I don't think . . .

FH: Didn't he dabble in politics?

NASSER: . . . no, he didn't dabble in politics.

THIRD PARTY: Well, he . . . .

FH: He ran for mayor once, didn't he?

NASSER: He run for . . . they coaxed him to run for mayor 'til he finally agreed to it. And then they beat his butt off. The people that he helped beat him.

THIRD PARTY: He was the greatest guy we ever had in Terre Haute.

NASSER: He was a great fellow. You better believe it! I used to go in there with my coaster wagon for my dad when he had a store there at 120 Wabash. And kid-like . . . he had all them cookies in there. You know how a bakery smells? And I got my nose in there, looking at them cookies you know? And he'd be putting bread in my coaster wagon to take to my dad. And, of course, the guy never missed nothing. Next thing I knew he had about a No. 12 sack . . .

THIRD PARTY: Full of cookies. Yeah. "Take these home."

NASSER: . . . put them in my wagon. "I didn't order them, Mr. Fitzgerald." He says, "You tell Uncle George (that's my dad) . . . you tell Uncle George to give it to the children at home and let them have some cookies" I'd say, "Thank you, Mr. Fitzgerald." And I'd go on over 'cause that

NASSER: wasn't too far from my dad's store, just about a block. That's about all, from Ohio to Main Street.

FH: What about Jerry Shandy? He was a politician.

NASSER: Now, he was a politician.

FH: Was he a good guy?

NASSER: Oh, Jerry was a fine fellow.

FH: How about George Krietenstein?

NASSER: Krietenstein's another one.

THIRD PARTY: Tell us what you heard about them two.

FH: Nothing except I just knew who they were and that they had businesses.

NASSER: Do you remember . . . have you ever heard of the Reeses? George Reese?

FH: No.

NASSER: /He/ had a drugstore there at 2nd and Wabash on the southwest corner. Now, that's going before World War I.

THIRD PARTY: Oh, George Reese, yeah.

NASSER: You remember George Reese?

THIRD PARTY: Sure!

NASSER: Yeah, that was the center of Terre Haute -- right around that courthouse. That was . . . you see, when you got as far as almost 7th Street or 19th Street, you was out in the sticks! Of course, it's all different now, see.

Wasn't the old Terre Haute House called the Prairie House once? Seventh and Wabash.

Then you take right down there on the river on Main Street. /On/ this side of the river was

NASSER: a hotel. It had an upstairs porch and a downstairs porch. There was a big frame building there.

FH: Market?

NASSER: No.

FH: I mean Market Hotel. Was that the name of it?

NASSER: Now I can't recall the name. But I remember that as a kid.

THIRD PARTY: I remember the two boats that used to be down there.

NASSER: Oh, the Reliable and Reliance, river boats.

THIRD PARTY: Yeah, and there was a Winner and a Welcome . . . Winner Welcome boat.

NASSER: Winner Welcome?

THIRD PARTY: And the Reliable and the Reliance.

NASSER: Yeah, Reliable and Reliance are the ones I remember.

FH: Did you go to parties on those boats?

NASSER: Yeeeah, down the river. There was a big paddle on the back end.

FH: Were they just a group of young people or were they church parties or . . .

NASSER: Naw, it was different affairs at different times. You'd rent those boats.

THIRD PARTY: You rented them boats.

NASSER: Yeah. Just rent them.

FH: Where'd they go up to? Fort Harrison?

NASSER: Yeah.

THIRD PARTY: Yeah, go up to Fort Harrison and come back. Get back about midnight.

NASSER: Had dances and refreshments and just had a nice time. And marshmallows . . .

FH: What about medical care in those days?

NASSER: Well, I think it was more (laughs) better than it is today.

THIRD PARTY: Well, you had the dispensary, you know. That was always a great thing, one thing Mr. Chauncey Rose ever done . . .

NASSER: Today all they can see is that dollar.

THIRD PARTY: Chauncey Rose was a great man. He had the . . .

NASSER: Give you an aspirin and charge you a hundred dollars for an aspirin!!

THIRD PARTY: Rose Dispensary there, you know, for anybody, whoever, whatever. You could go there and get medicine; it didn't cost you nothing. They had a lot of people. We lived in a poor district here, see. We knew a lot of people that went up there, and that was their purpose -- to go up there and get medicine. And it was all the result of Chauncey Rose.

FH: People didn't go to the hospitals to have their babies then or for other things, did they?

THIRD PARTY: Oh, no, no. No.

NASSER: They had them at home.

THIRD PARTY: Yeah, and sometimes never had a doctor.

NASSER: Yeah, had a midwife.

THIRD PARTY: The woman next door.

NASSER: Midwife.

THIRD PARTY: The woman next door came over and . . . needed a big tub of hot water and some clean towels. And spanked that baby just like everybody else!

FH:                    Didn't the doctor usually come to your house instead of you going to him?

NASSER:                Oh, you better believe it.

THIRD PARTY:         Yeah. That's right.

FH:                    Do you feel that we had a better . . . medical care then?

THIRD PARTY:         Better relation, see.

NASSER:                Yeah. Today it's cold-blooded.

THIRD PARTY:         It's commercial.

NASSER:                Just all commercial. It's all a racket. First thing you go to a hospital. If you're dying, they want to know if you got hospitalization.

THIRD PARTY:         Yeah.

NASSER:                Do you owe the hospital anything?

THIRD PARTY:         Can't have any of this oxygen if you're not . . .

NASSER:                Can't have this here. Got to have a heart pacer or a pace heart or whatever you call it.

THIRD PARTY:         Pacemaker.

NASSER:                Pacemaker or somethin'. Or you're gonna die, you know, and all that sort of stuff. And /they/ give you intravenous and give you a slow injection and oh, God Almighty. And every time they turn their finger they charge you 25, 30 bucks just to twist your finger.

FH:                    What about funerals now?

NASSER:                Funerals?

FH:                    Does it cost as much to die (laughs) as it does to live?

NASSER:                It costs a lot cheaper to die . . . it's cheaper to die than it is to try to live.

THIRD PARTY: It's pretty expensive for a . . .

NASSER: Why, you go to a hospital and if you don't get out . . . if you get out any time at all for less than 20, 30 thousand dollars . . . .  
/If/ they know you got hospitalization, they jack the bill up to begin with. Then you still have to dig down in your pocket for a few hundred dollars, because you'll be short so much. No wonder they can buy \$200,000 homes and own thousands of acres. They gotta have a loophole somewhere.

FH: Do you think Terre Haute's looking up now? The downtown area?

NASSER: Well, I've always . . . it's gonna . . . I don't know what's going to happen to the downtown area, just between us. I think they're draggin' their feet too much.

THIRD PARTY: I think they're going to have to wait until the cycle comes 'round again, see. The cycle was in favor of the out-of-town . . . the shopping centers and the places like that . . .

NASSER: Well, you take your big stores that's left downtown . . .

THIRD PARTY: That cycle comes back around again. I don't care how much . . . 50 million dollars? It might as well throw it in the river down here.

NASSER: You take like Root's. Been on Main Street for years and years and years. What's left there on Main Street to draw people? Meis's and Schultz. What else is there?

THIRD PARTY: That's it.

NASSER: Not Paige's Music Store! You ain't gonna buy a piano every week.

THIRD PARTY: If they'd clear away a few square blocks . . . .

FH: What do you think caused it? Just the general trend to move to the suburbs?

NASSER:           Too much graft, I'll tell you what it is.  
Too much graft.

FH:               Political graft?

NASSER:           Political graft. Somebody saw an idea and  
they started and then another thing . . . well,  
I don't want to get into that. (laughs) Might  
be stepping on somebody's toes.

FH:               Well, thank you very much, both of you,  
for helping us out. And I'm sure that there'll  
be a lot of people interested in all the fine  
things you've said about Terre Haute.

END OF TAPE



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